



Save SeaWorld. Kill PETA.

By R. Brownell

March 17, 2015

Almost a year ago, I was traveling to San Diego to attend a week long Cato Institute seminar. I walked off the plane upon arrival to see something which was definitely in the realm of odd. A rather large advertisement posted to a wall outside of my gate showed a killer whale eating a SeaWorld board member. The unlucky board member didn't have a name, but the point was clear, PETA wasn't happy with SeaWorld making money off of captive whales.

Recently searching through headlines to keep abreast of current events, I stumbled upon an article discussing the effects of a 2013 documentary called "Black Fish", and how the evidence of animal cruelty has since damaged the reputation and profits of SeaWorld. As of February, 2015, the numbers of visitors at SeaWorld has dropped by one million. I've never been the owner or board member of a large corporation, but this is a big enough drop in numbers to draw some major concern. In March of 2014, a legislator from California proposed the Orca Welfare and Safety Act, after even more Animal Welfare Act violations were found to be broken after an investigation by the USDA. The law is up for consideration this year, and if it passes, SeaWorld is essentially out of the show business for good.

SeaWorld has been in the crosshairs of the US government and PETA for almost half a century. Even before the abuse of creatures in captivity began to go public, animal rights activist were going after zoos, circuses, and aquariums, arguing that the captivity of animals for profit was unethical. The issue I have is this, the US government and PETA feels that these animals are going to somehow live happily and safely once they are released, which is very far from the truth. Anyone that was ever a fan of the Black Rhino, Mexican Grizzly Bear, or Javan Tiger know that even in nature left on their own, animals are going to die as a result of a myriad of reasons such as starvation, ecological disaster, predation, or whatever else you could guess; it's also pretty basic knowledge that poachers usually don't care about things such as laws protecting endangered species.

One could make the comparison to gun free zones on college campuses, knowing full well that mass murderers obviously aren't going to care about a sign that says "no guns allowed".

Sometimes the real humane option is to put these endangered creatures in an environment such as SeaWorld, where even they understand it's not a good idea to kill your cash cow; instead of the other option, of simply saying you care about the wellbeing of these animals, and then literally leaving them in a kill zone for people that don't share your same compassion.

The basics of capitalism show that when your clients aren't happy with the way you run your business, they will without a doubt let you know how they feel the moment they start to spend their money elsewhere. SeaWorld can learn a little from the Nike sweatshop scandal from the early 1990's, where Nike's entire company suffered blowback from customers who began to associate Air Jordans with inhumane child labor.

Left with the awkward elephant in the room (i.e. "what can we do to make people like us and buy our shit again?"), Nike began to understand that it didn't just have a responsibility to its stock holders, but that it had an even greater responsibility to the customers who made the business as successful as it was. After the sweatshop scandal went public, Nike began to fix the issue by forming the Fair Labor Association, a non-profit which linked companies and human rights advocates to create a self-regulating organization to look out for the humane treatment of employees. Since then, Nike has continued to show their promise to excellence by sharing their audit data, workplace standards, and commitments as part of their new corporate social responsibility reports.

If SeaWorld wants to continue to see their profits in a state of constant free fall, then they should keep doing what they're doing, because it's working! If they want to reverse this trend, then it's time for a "come to Jesus" moment. Above all, customers need to realize that if they want natural, authentic change, it's smarter to continue to make SeaWorld's profits hurt instead of bringing down the heavy fist of regulation to fix something that the market is doing already on its own. Besides, I'd rather trust SeaWorld to take care of Shamu versus PETA, who kills more animals than Mike Vic at a dog fight.

So please everyone, the news is out, it is time to give SeaWorld a second chance to change just as every business should be given when faced with this kind of continual backlash; but if you want stay angry at anyone, let me recommend PETA once again.